

Through Their Eyes: Women and Human Security in Kashmir

Journal of Asian Security
and International Affairs

8(2) 147–173, 2021

© The Author(s) 2021

Reprints and permissions:

in.sagepub.com/journals-permissions-india

DOI: 10.1177/23477970211017483

journals.sagepub.com/home/aia



Sehar Iqbal¹ 

Abstract

‘Women’s responsibilities call upon them to function in many spheres of human experience ... (and so) their perspective on human security is comprehensive, including factors overlooked by the state security paradigm’ (Reardon, 2010a, *The gender imperative: Human security vs state security*, Routledge, p. 16). Recognising this, the following research article records threats to human security in Kashmir as seen from the point of view of a representative cross-section of Kashmiri women. It argues that in the context of the Kashmir valley, no discussion of security is complete without broadening the perspective from state security to human security. Again, no analysis of human security in Kashmir is complete without taking into account Kashmiri women’s experience of human security threats. The lived experiences of women in Kashmir and their perspectives should be at the heart of any human security analysis. This article aims at recording these threats faced by Kashmiri women in their daily lives, using a case study model. It records the lived experiences of 20 women from different ethnicities, religions, regions and locations within the valley. In doing so, it acknowledges not only the constraints of the case study model but also the centrality of women’s rights to identify and confront the threats to their conceptions and experiences of security. It limits itself to the Kashmir valley where the worst of the violence has occurred since 1989. Twenty women from seven districts—Srinagar, Pulwama, Budgam, Kulgam, Anantnag, Baramulla and Kupwara—have been interviewed over a 6-month period. In order to understand diverse conceptions and experiences of threats to human security, care was taken to include women from diverse ethnic and religious communities. The study covers Sikh, Sunni and Shia Muslim, Gujjar, Pahari and Kashmiri Pandit women.

Keywords

Kashmir, security, women’s agency, half-widows, sexual violence, migration

¹The Sajid Iqbal Foundation, Srinagar, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Corresponding author:

Sehar Iqbal, The Sajid Iqbal Foundation, Second Floor, IQ Mall, Hyderpora Crossing, Srinagar, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir 190014, India.

E-mail: Iqbal.sehar@gmail.com

Introduction

Since the armed conflict in Kashmir started in 1989, it has claimed more than 50,000 lives (some estimates put this as high as a 100,000) and led to countless injuries, destruction of property, migration and human distress. The erstwhile princely state is claimed in its entirety by both India and Pakistan. Moreover, China, which controls the Aksai Chin and the Shaksgam Valley, a large tract ceded by Pakistan, claims to be a party to the dispute. The historical developments leading to the conflict, its bilateral ramifications for India and Pakistan and the impact of the violence on the population have been widely researched. Most studies have focused on the competing claims and competences of state sovereignty and on the threats to state security the enduring conflict poses.

Successive national governments in India have continued to view the dispute through a narrow state security lens. State security rests on the premise that 'only with strong militaries can nations have an assurance of security' (Reardon, 2010a). It perceives the state under near-constant threat and advocates the strengthening of military capability and deployment to gain an advantage over other nation states and dissidents with the state. State security is then an inherently oppositional, vertical conception of security that views the state as the primary subject of security studies and policy. Militarism, the natural corollary to the state security approach, is, thus, based on exceptionalism, that is, identifying countries competing with your country as the 'other' and opposing them through oppositional military and diplomatic action. When applied internally by countries, this oppositional paradigm of state security can lead to othering and dehumanisation of dissident groups and individuals associated with them (Reardon, 1985).

This approach is used by political and military actors to justify an ever-increasing military response by the state to dissidents themselves as well as their larger communities and networks. The same approach has been used by the Indian government in Jammu and Kashmir since the early 1990s. As Duschinski and Hoffman observe, India 'has identified Kashmir as a site of emergency and exception, justifying militarised governance in the region' (Duschinski & Hoffman, 2011, p. 45). What this effectively means is that Kashmir valley is one of the most heavily militarised regions on earth—a place 'saturated with (the apparatus of) state security' (Duschinski & Hoffman, 2011, p. 46). Armed patrols, check points, cordon and search operations, indiscriminate arrests and public intimidation are common, and the violence between armed forces and militants spills over with chilling regularity into civilian spaces—homes and markets. This has had a debilitating effect on human rights and, ultimately, on human security in the region.

In recent years, India's position has hardened further as the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party has come to power for its second successive term. In August 2019, the Indian government stripped the state of Jammu and Kashmir of special constitutional provisions that gave it a degree of legal autonomy, separated the Kashmir valley and Jammu from Ladakh and brought both parts (Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh) under direct rule from the centre in the form of separate Union territories. The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir was fortified with

even more armed presence. However, this more militaristic policy and curtailment of civil liberties have not led to a corresponding decrease in violence, with incidence of militant attacks remaining more or less the same. This scenario seems to confirm that 'Without human security, state security cannot be attained...' (CHS, 2003). The human security lens, therefore, is a precursor to understanding and then mitigating the effect of the conflict on human lives in Kashmir.

The human security approach broadens the conception of security from its traditionally narrow focus on state security, with its preoccupations with territory and influence between and within states. Human security looks at human beings as the primary subject of security studies and policy, analysing how human security deprivations lead to the undermining of peace and security. It supports more preventive responses and contextually relevant solutions to insecurity within and outside the state. This includes improving access of individuals and communities to health, education, political participation and a good quality of life within the state and forming partnerships with nations with similar interests and values. It is, thus, a broader, more horizontal and collaborative conception of security.

Experts on gendered approaches to security such as Abdul Ali, Hans, Price and Reardon stress that war or armed response by state and non-state groups is in itself a result of the state security model's primary reliance on oppositional thinking, othering and dehumanisation of insurgent groups. They argue that this is the reason for the failure of state security policy to generate lasting peace. They further contend that this makes the human security framework the only viable model to bring about peace and security.

Literature Review

According to Holzner and Truong (1997), 'all forms of human (in)security are gendered, even though their manifestations, patterns and degree of intensity may be specific and context dependent' (Holzner & Truong, 1997). They argue this is because of the inherently gendered nature of societal structures and assigned roles that restrict women's agency, lives and their access to resources, thus creating persistent threats to their security. The work of Melander and Caprioli highlights the criticality of factoring such gendered inequities in access to food, water, shelter, education, income and public health facilities (including mental health facilities) in human security analyses.

In 2014, a team of public health experts from Harvard and Yale undertook a field study on human security from women's perspectives in Cameroon. Women and girls above 18 years of age were queried the components of the Leaning Arie model and 'self-reported mental health, self-reported reproductive health and sexual violence experienced by the respondent only' (Parmar et al., 2014). The results were shocking: a substantial number of respondents had experienced sexual violence by intimate partners, unknown men or community members, and the fear of more such attacks worsened their experience and perceptions of their own security. Based on these results, the research team argued that 'assessing

levels of sexual and intimate-partner violence in a community is crucial to understanding levels of human security', and that any study on human security would be meaningless without these.

The interplay between human security and long-standing armed conflict has also been studied from a gender perspective. Normah Nemeh's 2010 case study explores the impact of sexism and militarism (and the interplay thereof) on Jordanian women. It identifies the 'feminization of honour' and 'shaming women to conform to certain standards of behaviour' (Reardon, 2010b, p. 333) as manifestations of patriarchy and the militarisation that defined many Arab states after they became independent: 'Militarism functions as a mechanism geared towards the social and cultural transformation of individuals to believe military ideals, needs and beliefs to be normal and valuable....' Similarly, Akibayashi and Takazato's 2017 study of US military presence in Okinawa explores how hypermasculinity, othering and the dynamics of controlled US army personnel to execute a recurring pattern of sexual violence against local girls and women. Chenoy and Chenoy (2010) make similar observations about women living in Maoist-affected areas in India.

All these phenomena are visible in the Kashmir context, but there is a distinct dearth of research on the intersection between conflict and gender. Many studies of Kashmiri women are limited to the 'women as victims' paradigm. Research from this point of view started primarily with sociologist B. A. Dabla's work on the impact of armed conflict on women and children in the valley in the late 1990s. Walikhanna (2004), Lone (2010), Bilal (2015), Bhat (2017) and many others followed suit. In print media too, most articles by male Kashmiri journalists follow this pattern—tending to cast women in their assigned gendered roles of wives, mothers, sisters and daughters and then highlighting how violence is preventing them from fulfilling these assigned roles; for example, newspaper reports in the past have highlighted how the killing of a husband leaves a wife 'helpless' and without a 'breadwinner' or how someone arrested was 'the only brother' with numerous 'unmarried sisters', implying that without their brother and, subsequently, a husband, these women are an economic and social burden too heavy for the family to bear. Apart from being obviously regressive, this type of research and writing undermines the agency Kashmiri women have over their own lives and their families and relegates them to repositories of family and community honour.

The work of Chouduri et al. (1994), Butalia (2001), Manchanda (2001), Van Der Mollen and Ball (2011) and Manekshaw (2017) is a counterpoint to this reductionist view. Manchanda and Butalia in particular challenge the centrality of male narratives to the way in which the conflict is theorised. They argue that the 'women as victims' paradigm seeks to undermine women's agency in overcoming physical, mental, financial and societal challenges and building better lives for their families. They also present case studies to demonstrate how women's experiences and narratives of conflict are completely different from those of men, owing to their gender, religious, ethnic and class identities. They argue that Kashmiri women's struggle against patriarchy and militarism makes them survivors who have earned the right to have their perceptions and experiences factored into any conceptualisation of the Kashmir conflict.

Qutab (2012) also offers a balanced view of the gendered contours of Kashmiri society and how the entrenched patriarchy among security forces and Kashmiri society makes women's positions far worse than the armed conflict alone:

They (Kashmiri women) have faced harassment from both the armed forces, as a punishment for their support for the armed struggle and also to 'break' the movement, and the (sic) militant groups, who wanted to reinforce hegemony in the region or punished them for being state informers. Along with attacks on their life and safety, they were specifically targeted for rape and abuse. In the conservative Kashmir society, 'honour', is directly associated with its women. And when this honour was violated, the society responded with anger, but often failed to support the (sic) women victims. (Qutab, 2012)

Butt et al. (2016) also give a nuanced account of

how patriarchy, filtered through the masculinist apparatus of the Indian Army, led to the execution of a horrific sexual crime in Kunan Poshpora and how the victims suffered at the hands of both the uniformed perpetrators and embedded cultural notions of 'dishonour' employed by their own families, neighbours, the media and Kashmiri society in general. (Iqbal & Magill, 2021)

Their analysis shows how ubiquitous the ideas of the feminisation of honour and ensuring female subordination through social control and violence are among the security forces on one hand and Kashmiri society on the other. Ultimately, the women do not just suffer from the sexual violence but also because of the lack of support system and social marginalisation. Though important in understanding aspects of the problem, none of these studies look at the entire construct of human security through the eyes of a cross-section of Kashmiri women. This is the gap that this study aims to fill.

The central premise of this study is that no discussion of security in the context of Kashmir valley is complete without broadening the perspective from state security to human security. Again, no analysis of human security in Kashmir is complete without taking into account Kashmiri women's experience of human security threats. Accordingly, the article looks at the threats to human security that Kashmiri women face in their daily lives, in detail, through the study of their lived experiences.

Methodology

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) defines human security as 'people-centred, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, context specific and prevention oriented' (United Nations Human Security Unit Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2009). It views human security as a composite of economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, political security and community security. Threats that affect any component are seen as diminishing human security in a region overall. This framework emphasises protection of

human rights and freedoms and empowerment (to increase people's resilience against difficult situations, as mutually reinforcing critical processes that enhance human security): 'Human security makes no distinction between different kinds of human rights—civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights thereby addressing violations and threats in a multidimensional and comprehensive way' (United Nations Human Security Unit Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2009).

Accordingly, this study focuses on threats to each component of human security that exist in Kashmir with respect to women (with the exception of food security because hunger and famine are not endemic in Kashmir since 1947).¹ This definition also builds on the UNOCHA model as well as the Leaning Arie model of human security that says:

A community has a core bundle of resources—material, psychological and social that ensures their survival. These include not only food, water, clothing, shelter and income but also a sense of home and safety, constructive family and social supports, and an acceptance of the past and positive grasp of the future.... If (these) minimum material inputs can be guaranteed and if efforts can be made to shore up basic social coping capacities, societies will be more stable and less prone to fragmentation, violence and atrocity. (Leaning & Arie, 2001)

It adds to this model social concerns and a gendered understanding of human security, with reference to access, agency and bodily integrity based on the work of Caprioli, Menander, Reardon and Butalia. 'Women's responsibilities call upon them to function in many spheres of human experience... (and so) their perspective on human security is comprehensive, including factors overlooked by the state security paradigm'. Therefore, this study aims at recording threats to human security in Kashmir as seen from the point of view of a representative cross-section of Kashmiri women. In doing so, it acknowledges not only the constraints of the case study model but also the centrality of women's rights to identify and confront the threats to their conceptions and experiences of security.

In its 2013 report, the UN's Special Rapporteur on violence against women observed:

Women living in militarised regions, such as Jammu and Kashmir... live in a constant state of siege and surveillance, whether in their homes or in public. Information received through both written and oral testimonies highlighted the use of mass rape... enforced disappearance, killings and acts of torture and ill treatment, which were used to intimidate and to counteract political opposition and insurgency. (Manjoo, 2014; Qayoom, 2014, p 165)

Therefore, this study puts the lived experiences of women in Kashmir and their perspectives at the heart of human security. It limits itself to Kashmir valley where the worst of the violence has occurred since 1989. Twenty women from seven districts—Srinagar, Pulwama, Budgam, Kulgam, Anantnag, Baramulla and Kupwara—who have faced human security threats have been interviewed over 4 months between October 2019 and March 2020. The author scanned news stories

and case studies by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to find women who had faced serious security threats. The NGO staff were then requested to help locate the women's addresses. The women were approached by the author in their houses for the purpose of interview. The nature and scope of the study as well as the ultimate use of the data collected were explained to each participant. Written consent was acquired from all participants. The interview was designed as semi-structured to give participants more control of the process. It was written in English and administered in Kashmiri by the author, a native Kashmiri speaker. The responses were recorded in English.

Within each district, women from different areas—rural, urban and semi-urban—have been interviewed. The sample includes urban and rural women and women from various economic, educational and occupational backgrounds ranging from 26 to 78 years old. In order to understand diverse conceptions and experiences of threats to human security, care has been taken to include women from diverse ethnic and religious communities—the study covers Sikh, Sunni and Shia Muslim, Gujjar, Pahari and Kashmiri Pandit women. To protect the identity of the participants, they have been referred to by numbers and not names.

Human Security and Women: A Grassroots Perspective from Kashmir

Threats to Personal Security

Death

Interviewee 1 (aged 48) from Kokernag recalls how her 49-year-old mother was hit by three bullets while tending to her *vaed* (vegetable garden) as a gunfight between security forces and militants raged in November 1993. So fierce was the fighting that no one from the family (including the interviewee's two brothers) was able to pick up the body until 11 PM in the night when the encounter ended. The incident traumatised Interviewee 1 who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), insomnia and depression for years afterwards. 'When she first passed away, I would hear her voice in my head every time I lay down to sleep. I couldn't sleep or speak to anyone and would shut myself in my room. I wanted to die with her'. Her older brother eventually took her to see a psychiatrist in Srinagar in 1994. She is on medication ever since. As she approaches the age at which her mother died, her biggest fear remains the fear of an early and violent death, before she has had the chance to see her children settled and doing well in life.

Interviewee 2 (aged 53) from Hutmara describes how her 8-year-old daughter was killed in June 1996. She was picking apples from their orchard when she was hit by five bullets fired by security forces. The personnel who fired were providing security cover for an election rally by a local National Conference leader and mistook a tyre burst on a parked truck for a grenade attack. Keen to brush the matter under the carpet and to keep the election campaigns running smoothly, the local police did not file a First Information Report about the child's death, and no

compensation was given to the victim's traumatised family. She cries while recounting the experience.

The back of her head was blown off completely by the bullets. I had to bathe her (before burial) in that state. It would have been easier for me to die. I couldn't function after that. I couldn't talk to anyone in my village. Staying there was killing me.

The deaths of Interviewee 1's mother and Interviewee 2's daughter illustrate how armed violence threatens women's lives in Kashmir. Whether as bystanders in public places or in their homes and gardens, women have been killed with alarming regularity since 1989. While exact numbers on the deaths of women are not available, activists estimate about 100,000 persons have been killed since 1989, while government figures put the figure near 50,000. Either way, the threat to life is ever present for Kashmiri women. As Manchanda observes, women in the valley 'have been killed in crossfire, shot in public demonstrations, blown up in grenade explosions or in shelling along the line of control' (Manchanda, 1999b).

Mental Trauma

Her daughter's death shook Interviewee 2 completely. Her biggest insecurity thereafter was protecting her younger daughter from a similar fate. She prevailed upon her husband (a government employee) to move to Jammu which was considered safer. This cut her off from her extended family. Initially, she found it difficult to adjust to the hot weather, the completely different language and culture and the lack of local support networks. She would lie in bed most of the day listless or crying. Both her physical and mental health suffered. Her husband took her to a psychiatrist who diagnosed her with PTSD and severe depression and put her on medication. After 8 months on medication, she felt better, and with her husband's encouragement, she began to work as an insurance agent. She says her situation would have been worse if she did not have her work to distract her from the gnawing feeling of insecurity.

Interviewees 1 and 2 represent the dramatic increase in mental illness in Kashmir since 1989 due to the conflict and traumatic events witnessed by the population. A 2017 study of mental health conducted in each district of the valley by Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) revealed that 1.8 million adults (45% of the adult population) suffered from some form of significant mental distress. The prevalence of all types of mental disorders was more for women than for men; for example, 'Although men reported a higher number of experienced or witnessed traumatic events compared with women, the prevalence of probable PTSD was higher among women...' (Housen et al., 2017).

The same results held for depression (50% women as against 37% men) and anxiety disorder (36% women and 21% men). The researchers explained that this disproportionately higher burden on the mental health of Kashmiri women could be due to

Sociocultural factors common to Kashmiri society and others in the region (that) could bear impact on women's ability to access support. Kashmiri men have more

opportunities to move around outside of the home, whereas women are largely confined to domestic chores and responsibilities, having limited social interaction outside the home. (Housen et al., 2017)

Injury and Disability

In September of 2018, Interviewee 3 (aged 37) from Baramulla was washing dishes in her house when she heard a neighbour yelling that security forces had come to their neighbourhood to pick up local boys who had been part of street protests. Her 5-year-old son was playing outside, and she rushed to get him into the house. 'A policeman some distance away saw me and shot pellets straight at me'. She was hit on her chest and face. Pellets entered both her eyes leaving her near blind (her left eye has zero vision, and her right eye has just 10% vision). 'He was close enough to see that I had no weapon, no stone in my hand. Then why did he fire at me?', she questions. After four surgeries and medical bills of over ₹700,000 that were borne by her brother, she is nowhere close to regaining her vision. 'I have become a burden on my family. My husband doesn't want to take me to his home, and I am left alone to take care of my child'.

She is not alone. 2016 saw massive street protests erupt all over the Kashmir valley due to the killing of a popular militant commander, Burhan Wani. The government tried to control the protests by using pellet guns, a move criticised internationally as violative of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. The street protest became cyclical due to violent government reprisals and continued till 2018. Hospital records from government run hospitals show at least 12,000 people were injured by pellet guns and sought medical care in 2018 alone, but organisations and activists put the number as twice that citing reports of many pellet victims who were too scared to get registered at hospitals fearing police reprisals and arrests. According to a government report, more than 1,700 people were partially or fully blinded by pellet guns in 2018, a figure that included large numbers of women. Many, like Interviewee 3, have received no compensation from the government and are struggling in their daily lives with disability and the added burden of unaddressed mental trauma. Apart from pellet injuries, women in rural and urban Kashmir have been injured in crossfire between militants and armed forces, in bomb blasts and other incidents of violence since 1989. The threat of serious, life-changing injury is ever-present.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is one of the biggest human security threats faced by Kashmiri women. According to a 2006 report by Médecins sans Frontières, 'Kashmiri women are among the worst sufferers of sexual violence in the world. Sexual violence has been routinely perpetrated on Kashmiri women, with 11.6% of respondents saying they were victims of sexual abuse'. The report also said that the major perpetrators of sexual violence were the armed forces and the police. Since the violence spills over to public and private spaces all over Kashmir valley,

the gendered contours of a war that is neither an all-male arena nor restricted to spaces of combat between the military, enemy soldiers and/or alleged militants. It is a darker

war characterized by physical targeting of civilians and, more specifically, the sexual targeting of women by uniformed guardians of the state... The sexual targeting of women by state forces is a political act which should be subject to public scrutiny and accountability. (Kazi, 2009)

This is consistent with the fact that ‘...manifestation(s) of patriarchy... (are clearly seen in the organization of militaries and their behaviour toward women (both civilian and military women) ... in areas of long-term military presence’ (Reardon, 2010a, p. 15).

Manchanda (1999a) describes how sexual violence is perpetrated by militants against women labelled *mukhbirs* (informers) for the armed forces—particularly Hindu women from the Kashmiri Pandit community who were labelled so often because of their religion. She lists three such cases but stops short analysing the individual and social impact of the sexual attacks on their daily lives. The sexual violence by militants against Kashmiri Pandit women in the 1990s was particularly gruesome and most were murdered after being raped. However, after the mass migration of the Kashmiri Pandit community in 1990, such cases in Kashmir valley became rarer as militants could not afford to alienate ‘small villages (that) are the primary providers of food, shelter, financial resources, and intelligence for insurgent groups’ (Human Rights, 1993). As Manchanda notes, ‘in the last couple of years violence against women (by militants) have (sic) taken a new form: rape is not usually a part of it’ (Manchanda, 1999b, p. 2).

Interviewee 4 (aged 25) was 13 when she was raped by soldiers belonging to the army camp nearby her village Dandipora.

Six soldiers barged into our house on December the 3rd, 2008. They forbid us from turning on the lights, locked my father in one room and my mother and two siblings in another. I was taken to another room and raped by four of them while two guarded the door. When villagers heard my mother screaming through the window they came towards the house. Before they reached us, the soldiers ran away.

Her father, the local *Imam* (priest) was pressurised by the army and local police not to register the case. When the villagers blocked the highway in protest, the police finally registered the case as a ‘molestation by persons unknown’. No action was taken to investigate the case thereafter. Interviewee 4 and her family have long given up on justice but continue to suffer because of social exclusion. No one from their community wants to marry her and her sister, and she rarely ventures out of her home for fear of people gossiping about her. Her father’s social standing plummeted since the incident and he was replaced with another *Imam*. ‘If it were up to me, I would go far away from this village where no one knows what happened to me. Living here is going through it all over again, every day’.

Her ordeal is quite common for rape victims in Kashmir. The feminisation of honour within Kashmiri society heaps collective shame on both the rape victims and their closest male relatives for failing to protect their *izzat* (honour). In many cases, husbands have left their wives after they were raped, and girls have committed suicide to escape social ostracization (Human Rights, 1993).

Domestic Violence

Interviewee 5 (aged 28) from Budgam relates how her father had died 2 years before an accidental fire destroyed the family's home. She suffered burns to her arms and legs was in and out of hospital for 8 months for treatments and surgeries. Her burn injuries left her scarred, and because of this, she was married off by her mother to a man twice her age. 'We didn't have much to live on and because of the burns no one wanted to marry me. I had no option but to marry him'. Two years later, she had a daughter but daily beatings by her husband and mother-in-law made her return to her maternal uncle's house to live with her mother.

He would find any excuse to hit me. Sometimes he would say I didn't put enough salt in the tea, at other times he would say I was a loose woman and that he'd seen me talking to the neighbour's son. He would beat me, drag me by my hair and kick me. One day he kicked me till I bled from my mouth. I decided to leave but he did not let me take my daughter.

Her husband kept the child despite her pleading. She survives by working in other women's vegetable gardens for as little as ₹80 a day and a share of vegetables.

Her biggest insecurity comes from not having her daughter with her.

When I go to his house to see her, they lock her in a room and do not let me meet her. When I tell them she is small and needs my care they say she is their blood and I have no claim over her. Am I not her mother? Is she not my flesh and blood too? I applied to the local Shia leader's council for justice but my husband has a lot of influence with them. They just refused. I cried and screamed but they didn't care.

She is aware that if she approaches the courts, she can get the custody of her daughter and maintenance from her husband but fears this will turn her conservative community against her.

Like Interviewee 5, many women in Kashmir are victims of neglect or violence. 'Gender violence is a daily occurrence in virtually all societies, its severity and frequency is always heightened by regular presence of military, war and armed conflict' (Reardon, 2010a, p. 3). However, activists say that since the armed conflict began in 1989, Kashmir has seen a sharp increase in cases of gender violence. In an interview to *The Tribune* in 2016, Nayeema Ahmad Mehjoor, ex-chairperson of the State Commission for women, a government body that was set up to deal with women's issues, said that 'cases of domestic violence against women have risen seventy per cent'. These figures are consistent with studies in other conflict-affected communities where researchers have found that '...exposure to community violence normalizes the use of aggressive behaviour. As a result, youths learn that violence is an effective method of problem solving and, therefore, are more likely to engage in violent acts themselves' (Fowler et al., 2009).

Gutierrez and Gallagos studied the impact of civil conflict on the incidence of domestic violence in Peru between 2004 and 2012 and found that 'female exposure to conflict violence increases their later risk of being ... a victim of domestic

violence... Women more exposed to conflict violent events are more likely to justify the use of violence against women and more likely to stay in a violent relationship' (Gutierrez & Gallegos, 2016). The increase in cases of domestic violence in Kashmir and the public silence around it indicate that this relationship between exposure to conflict and domestic violence has become a major threat to security for the women in Kashmir.

Threats to Economic and Community Security

Loss of Male Family Members

Interviewee 6 (aged 63) belongs to the Kashmiri Sikh community. In 2001, she was at the *Gurdwara* (Sikh temple) in Mahjoor Nagar when she heard a volley of gunfire outside. Fearing for her husband and son who were outside, she rushed outside only to find a couple of armed gunmen on motorbikes firing at the people. She saw her son (aged 18) had been hit and ran to him. The gunmen showered bullets on her as she tried to shield him with her body. 'There was screaming and blood everywhere. I kept screaming for help for a long time before I realised I had been hit'. She was hit by 19 bullets in her stomach and thighs and was airlifted to Delhi for treatment. Her husband kept telling her that their son was alive and being treated in a Srinagar hospital. It was only after she was discharged and came home that she came to know that her son had died. Her husband passed away 2 years ago, but it is the loss of her son that weighs the heaviest on her. 'He was my future, my support in old age. Now I have no one. I have nothing to live for'. She lives with her sister and does not come out of her house anymore.

Interviewee 7 (aged 62) from Kulgam was married to her husband for 7 years before he became a militant. He was killed in 1991, and she was left to care for five young children. Initially her in-laws supported her and her children financially. 'They were very kind to me and looked after me as their own daughter. But after three years of continuous army raids on the house they were constantly afraid. They told me to leave'. Her in-laws gave her a small piece of land and some money as a share in her husband's property. Her brother and older children helped her in building two rooms on the land. She says that she was luckier than most other widows who are abandoned by in-laws and parents. 'At least I can grow vegetables on my plot and sell them. Many widows I know beg outside shrines'.

According to a report by the United Nations Commission for Human Rights (2018), 'killings, arbitrary arrest, administrative detention, excessive use of force, torture and enforced disappearances' together constitute the ubiquitous threat to male family members of Kashmir women. To many, the loss of husbands represents a loss of the marital home and financial stability.² As Interviewee 7's case shows, regular raids on militants' families by armed forces and police can also create great insecurity for women. All these manifests as threats to women's relationships, resources and social support systems, which in turn threatens their security.

Disruptions to Spousal Support and Livelihood: Half-Widows and Widows

Insecurity and lack of social support also extends to another category of women—the widows and half-widows of Kashmir. According to Bukhari:

The first difficulties surface soon after the death of their partners, in the form of emotional stress, denial of inheritance rights, sexual harassment and general social undesirability. The second wave of difficulties arises gradually, as loss of control over the children, and a growing sense of inferiority. Finally, the widows are burdened by the long term and growing demands of house care and the assignment of menial responsibilities. (Bukhari, 2002, p. 41)

Half-widows are women whose husbands have been disappeared by militants or security forces since 1989; official estimates of their numbers vary between 2,000 and 2,500 but activists say the number could easily be twice that. Though the disappeared husbands are presumed dead, their wives cannot remarry until their death is confirmed. In some religious schools of thought in Islam, this period can extend up to 90 years. Though a recent religious ruling by a composite body of religious scholars has shortened the waiting period to 4 years, not enough half-widows know about it and continue to struggle alone or with very little family support to raise their children. Government apathy compounds their problems. Without a death certificate, they cannot access their husband's bank account, get their share in his property or apply for a widow pension under an existing government scheme. As Haq (2017) notes, '...the disappearance of thousands of Kashmiri youth has made a measurable economic and mental impact' (Haq, 2017, p. 123).

Interviewee 8 (aged 35) from Aishmuqam has suffered all of this. She belongs to the *Pahari* community, an ethnically and linguistically distinct community living in the mountainous districts of the valley and Jammu. She was married to a housepainter and moved to Kupwara district in the north in 1997. Her husband left for Jammu in 2002 to find work in the winter months and was never heard of again. She says her in-laws asked her not to go outside the house, when all she wanted was to search for her husband. Her brother-in-law conducted the search for 8 months unsuccessfully, while she was caring for her 18-month-old daughter. When her in-laws realised that her husband was not coming back, they turned Interviewee 8 and her daughter out of their house. Interviewee 8 went back to her parents' house in Aishmuqam, and her father gave her a small piece of land on a rocky hillside where she constructed a small two-room house with financial assistance from the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, a civil society organisation that works with the families of the disappeared. She survives by cleaning and winnowing rice for her neighbours but does not make enough money to pay for her daughter's education. Her daughter aged 16, dropped out of school at 13 years of age and now assists her mother in household chores.

She says with tears in her eyes.

She is getting older and I didn't want anyone to talk about her. So, I've kept her home. If I had enough money, I would get her married. Till I am strong enough to work I can feed us but what happens when I can't? Already my back aches so much.

Interviewee 8's case is typical of half-widows in Kashmir who are evicted by their in-laws when their husbands cannot be traced. Most of them get little or no support from their in-laws who do not even give their children a share of the disappeared father's property. Not only does she have to raise her child alone, but the shared notions of 'honour' in her village community have meant that her daughter has had to give up on education and a life outside of manual work. She cannot go out of the village to find better paid work because of the same restrictions.

Qutab's (2012) study of half-widows in Kashmir explores the consequences of half-widowhood in detail. Her research highlights the 'economic, legal, social and psychological implications of half widowhood in Kashmir'. The problems faced by widows, who number 15,000 (Butalia, 2004), are similar. 'Relatives often refuse to support them, and they bear the burden of raising their children alone. They are often illiterate and have little know how of how to find paid work or of their rights and entitlements' (Qutab, 2012).

'Women's strategies for coping with poverty and care deficits demonstrate their resilience and active resistance in the face of economic and social obstacles' (Robinson, 2011, p. 10). Where widows have some income-generating skills, this resistance produces better resources for their families. Interviewee 9 (aged 32) from Shunglipora in Budgam is an example. She lives near Tosa Maidan, a mountain meadow leased by the state government to the Indian Army as a firing range from 1964 to 2014 that made communities from the 52 surrounding villages vulnerable to death and injury. She was 29 years old and pregnant with her second child when her husband was hit by a shell while grazing cows in Tosa Maidan. In the year that followed, she gave birth to her daughter at home with only the support of the village midwife. Her husband's family refused to assist her or her children financially and her aged father (who had helped her financially for the first 2 years) passed away.

My brother was already weighed down by the expenses of my mother and his own Ayaal (family) of four. He could not take care of me. I decided to stand on my own feet and started weaving carpets. My husband was a carpet weaver and he had taught me the skill.

The work brings her ₹100 a day, an amount insufficient to take care of both children. With tears in her eyes, she explains how she had to send her son to an orphanage in Srinagar. 'I don't earn enough for a family of three. At least there he gets four square meals and an education. That is more than I would ever be able to do for him'. Her daughter (11) dropped out of school last year. She does household chores and assists her mother in weaving carpets. When asked why she didn't send her daughter to study, Interviewee 9 said, 'I could not. She is a *yateem koor* (girl without a father) and we have to think about the family's honour. Times are hard for women living without a man. If she goes out people talk (about her character). How will she get married?' It is notable that her perceptions of her son

and daughter and their entitlements in life are completely different. Though Interviewee 9 is economically self-sufficient, her internalised notion of the feminisation of honour and social censuring by her neighbours places severe limits to her freedom and the freedom of her daughter. They cannot seek paid work or education outside their village and this handicap prevents them from improving their economic situation and quality of life. Both mother and daughter say that being labelled 'characterless' by their neighbours and community members is their biggest fear, as 'There is no male to protect us.'

Qutab explains that 'in Kashmiri society people look with suspicion at a woman who lives alone' (Qutab, 2012). This leads to a severe mental strain on widows, half-widows and orphaned girls, which leads them to curtail their movements and social interactions. The fallout from the feminisation of honour in Kashmir appears even more grave when one bears in mind that Jammu and Kashmir is one of the few states in India where education is free for all from primary school to university level and girls can study up to university level without any financial burden on their families.

Conversely, where investments are made into girls' education, they can thrive even after being orphaned. Interviewee 10's case is indicative of this. Her mother (aged 48) from Senzen, Pulwama, lost her husband to cancer in 2014. He was a manual labourer who insisted his daughter study. Interviewee 10 completed her bachelor's degree in Education in 2013 and was studying for a master's in Education when her father passed away. Her mother was determined to support her in finishing her studies, and for 3 years, she worked in a brick kiln until her daughter completed her studies and got a job at a local private school.

Interviewee 10 is educated and now works as a teacher in a private school earning ₹4,500 per month. This allows her to take care of herself, her widowed mother and two siblings. Her education has clearly helped her overcome the stigma of being a daughter without a father or older brother to 'protect her honour' and by extension the notional family honour. 'If I don't go out to work who will? People talk about honour but no one helps women unless they help themselves. Not having to beg from relatives or neighbours is the biggest honour.' It is clear that the high literacy rate of Senzen³ and its proximity to the urban centre of Pulwama contributes to more liberal social attitudes towards women, of which Interviewee 10 is a beneficiary, but her biggest insecurity comes from not being able to marry, as she has to support her family financially. 'If I marry and leave (for my husband's house) who will take care of my family? Till my brother grows up and starts earning I cannot marry and after that I will be too old.'

However, not all orphaned girls are allowed to complete their education; instead, some are married early by mothers and relatives desperate to be rid of extra mouths to feed. They are aided in this practice by the patriarchal social system that sees an unmarried girl as a liability and pushes for universal marriage as a norm. Many civil society organisations make a virtue out of this practice by arranging mass marriages of orphaned girls through charitable donations. However, not enough heed is paid to the well-being of these young girls or the suitability of their prospective husbands. This can create problems. Interviewee 11 is one such case. She lost both her parents in childhood and was sent to live

with relatives in Srinagar. They did not want to keep her and sent her to an orphanage. The orphanage authorities arranged a match for her, and she was married 2 years ago to a Kashmiri man working in Delhi. A year into the marriage, she discovered her husband was already married and supporting a family in Delhi. He divorced her soon after and abandoned her for good measure.

I told him I had nowhere to go but he didn't care. The orphanage wasn't interested in taking me back; they felt they had discharged their duty by getting me married. I found a helping friend in my neighbour who gave me shelter in her house. Otherwise I would have to beg in the streets.

She lives in her neighbour's house and survives by cleaning houses and winnowing rice for other neighbours. Her biggest insecurity is the lack of a permanent home. 'Till I can work I can stay here but when I am too old where can I go?' The lack of a shelter home is a major problem for women like Interviewee 11. The erstwhile State Women's Commission had passed a proposal for setting up shelter homes in the state, but despite many promises, the government never moved forward with the proposal.⁴

Abandonment

Interviewee 12 (aged 67) of Awantipora suffers from hypertension, diabetes and anaemia. She and her husband were turned out of their house by their sons 4 years ago. The elder one was a truck driver, the younger one a labourer, and neither one wanted to support their parents' medical bills in addition to their family expenses. Interviewee 12 and her husband now live in a ramshackle tin shed at the bottom of their garden, in view of their house. They get no support of any kind from their sons and survive on *Zakat* (the obligatory poor due) paid by their neighbours. She tried to apply for the government sponsored old age pension 3 years ago but did not get it. 'The officer asked for (a bribe of) five thousand rupees. If I had got that kind of money, why would I apply for a pension?' She still acts as the caregiver for her husband who is 8 years older than her. Her biggest source of insecurity is if her health deteriorates further, she has no caregiver and no money for expensive medical treatment. 'My mother used to say if you have sons you have support for life. But look at them (my sons)! They took away even what I used to have.'

As the life expectancy of women outstrips men in Jammu and Kashmir (it is one of the highest in India), women with serious medical problems are often abandoned in both urban and rural areas. Although no comprehensive data on abandoned women exist, the growing number of cases of abandonment in local courts and reports in local papers point to this trend. Abandonment of elderly women is an important topic of study in the future and needs more dedicated research.

It is not just elderly women who are abandoned. Women are also abandoned due to marital disputes, as in the case of Interviewee 13 (aged 35) from Anantnag who was abandoned by her husband for giving birth to a daughter. He refused to pay maintenance for her or the child. Interviewee 13 is currently fighting a court case in the District Court. She worked as a daily wager in the local government

primary school, but the government relieved her of her services abruptly in 2018 when it dismissed all daily wage labourers appointed after 2003. She lives with her brother who supports her basic expenses but has flatly refused to pay for legal expenses connected with her maintenance case. Her deepest insecurity is the lack of a regular income and uncertainty about the future of her daughter. 'If I were to die tomorrow who would look after my daughter? My husband refuses to acknowledge her as his daughter and keeps threatening to remarry.'

Threats to Health Security

Access to Healthcare Facilities Obstructed

Interviewee 14 (aged 30) from Tengar, Pulwama cries, as she recalls her mother's death.

There was a cordon and search operation by the armed forces in our village on the 31st of October 2018. During the search they (forces) broke streetlights and banged loudly on our door. My mother was a heart patient; she couldn't bear the noise and fell unconscious.

When family members saw her mother's condition, they put her in their car to take to the local hospital. 'Forces stopped our car and did not allow us to proceed. I begged and pleaded with them but they ordered us to wait till the search operation was over.' The family was detained for 25 min on the road leading out of their village. When they got to the hospital, Interviewee 14's mother was declared dead on arrival. 'If they let us go we could have reached on time and my mother would still be alive. How can I forget that?'

This is not a singular case. The frequent curfew and other restrictions on assembly and movement imposed by the government, cordon and search operations by armed forces, as well as public strikes and street protests make it supremely difficult for women across communities and regions in Jammu and Kashmir to access healthcare facilities. The past year was particularly hard for women needing medical treatment because of the restrictions on vehicle movement and the mobile phone ban that came into place after the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. For pregnant women and women requiring dialysis, chemotherapy and other emergency surgeries 'due to unavailability of transport, ambulance services, shortage of medical staff, and dwindling supplies of life-saving medications' (BMJ, 2019), the situation became life-threatening. The lack of access to medicine in Kashmir valley was also alarming in a population with 1.6 million cases of chronic ailments that require daily medication (BMJ, 2019).

The burden fell heaviest on rural women living in hard-to-reach areas with no access to public or private vehicles. Cases of stillbirths due to pregnant women having to walk long distances and miscarriages due to lack of timely communications with gynaecologists were recorded at Lal Ded Hospital, the main maternity hospital in Srinagar. According to activists, due to job losses after the

clampdown,⁵ many pregnant women whose husbands were laid off or unable to find work suffered from malnutrition during pregnancy which damaged their health and that of their babies (Rehbar, & Zahra, 2019). All this points to a serious disruption in women's ability to access timely and adequate healthcare, leading to a corresponding threat to their security.

Reduced Agency Over Own Health in Tribal Communities

Interviewee 15 (aged 22) is from the Gujjar community, a tribal group that mostly practices animal husbandry in the mountainous areas of Jammu and Kashmir. Her hands shake as she describes how she nearly died during pregnancy 2 years ago. Her village, Ahlan, is high in the mountains and the nearest hospital is 10 km away.

My baby was due in the second week of December. The narrow road connecting the village to the hospital was covered with heavy snow and no vehicles were plying. We could not go on the date. After a week, my husband and neighbours carried me on a wooden cot to the hospital. The way was so slippery I thought they'd slip and I'd die right there.

The situation did not get much better at the hospital. There was no doctor on duty and the local medical assistant refused to evaluate her condition. He told her husband to take her back and bring her back in a week. After 4 days, she was in extreme pain and her husband and neighbours again carried her to the hospital. The doctor, a young woman in her 30s evaluated her and said she had a serious uterine infection. The baby was delivered by caesarean section and she had to spend a week recovering in the hospital. 'The doctor told me if I had come a few days later I could've died.' Her lack of agency over her own reproductive health scares her the most. In her village, the more sons a woman has, the more her social status. This constant pressure by her husband and in-laws to have more children scares her. She does not want to be in a situation where her life is at risk again.

Looking at the problem more broadly, it can be observed that Gujjar women are more vulnerable to maternal mortality because their community mostly resides in remote mountain villages near mountain meadows where they can graze their animals, often far away from hospitals, and these are the women in settled Gujjar communities; the problem is worse in the nomadic Gujjar population that migrates in and out of the state with their flocks. In a field study of on reproductive health in the Doda district, Arora and Khan (2017) noted that 'Gujjar respondents both males and females have no knowledge of common causes of maternal deaths, amniotic fluid, calcium, anaemia during pregnancy, contagious diseases and chances of having low birth weight infant'. More worryingly, they observed that '(the) majority of women (70%) knew danger signs during delivery On the other hand, the majority of men (87%) had no knowledge of danger signs during delivery'. This becomes especially worrying considering that the decision to shift pregnant or otherwise ill women to the hospital is ultimately taken by their closest male relatives. Women in these remote communities have little or no say in decisions that affect their lives and deaths. Since tribal communities constitute

12% of Jammu and Kashmir's population (Census of India, 2011), this is a serious threat to health security for women in the region.

Threats to Community Security

Loss of Home

[Humans] are anchored and seek safety in a sense of home; they find meaning, identity, and functional support in their relationships with family and community; and they build their lives through time, depending upon their sense of trust in the future and their sense of freedom from the past. (Leaning & Arie, 2001)

This definition of human security by Leaning and Arie emphasises the importance of a stable home to human security. In Kashmir, armed conflict has led to the displacement of hundreds and thousands of people from their homes. The single largest category of such migrants come from the Kashmiri Pandit community, though Kashmiri Muslims and Sikhs have migrated too.

According to government figures tabled in the State Legislative Assembly in 2010, out of a total population of 150,000 Kashmiri Pandits living in Kashmir in 1990, 24,202 families migrated from the valley in January 1990. At five persons a family, that figure comes to 121,010 persons, which means 28,990 persons were left behind. Over the decades that followed 'that's come down to around 3,500 people' (Thapar, 2019). Those that left faced the loss of home and an uncertain future. Many had little in the way of social connections outside the state and continue to live in two-room tenements built by the government in Purkhoo, Muthi, Jagti and Nagrota in Jammu. Those with better financial and social resources have spread out across India and the world, leaving the community with a fragmented sense of identity. Among migrant Kashmiri Pandit women, the loss of home and hearth is the biggest trauma.

Interviewee 16 (aged 78), a retired government schoolteacher from the Kashmiri Pandit community, recalls how she was forced to leave her home in Kashmir.

It was the winter of 1989. After Tika Lal Taploo and Hridaynath Ganjoo had been shot dead we heard about the kidnapping of Mufti's daughter. There was this fear and insecurity, like anything bad could happen to us at any time. My husband, a senior government official, decided to move the family to Delhi where our son was based. We thought we would come back once the situation gets better. It's been more than thirty years. I am still waiting.

The loss of her marital home in Karan Nagar is still palpable for her. 'When one is my age one only wants to be in one's own oal (nest). That is still my home and I want to live out my last days there'. Her house was taken over by the 25th Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force in 1991 who use it as a base camp. Her son visited Kashmir 2 years ago and filed an application with the civil authorities for handing the house back to the family. No action has been taken on

his request. He told me that the soldiers have broken down all the beautiful wooden partitions in the main part and use it for storing oil and other supplies. Interviewee 15's biggest insecurity is dying in Delhi like her husband. 'Thirty years of living here has not made this my house. To me it is just a dera (temporary shelter). I want to die in my house at peace, looking at the beautiful wooden ceiling and feeling the presence of my ancestors'.

Loss of Social Support Networks

The Kashmiri Pandits who remain in the valley face a different set of problems. Interviewee 17 (aged 50) runs a medical store in Pantha Chowk where she has lived all her life.

Most of our relatives migrated to Jammu after 1990. We also thought of going but our neighbours came to our house and told us not to worry about anything. They took turns to guard our house and shop during the night for the worst years.

But her biggest insecurity comes from not having the support of her relatives, especially her sisters who migrated. 'For us, our family was our world. Every small happiness or sadness was shared. Now there is no one here.' Her biggest insecurity is the loss of kinship support due to her relatives migrating. 'When my mother-in-law died in 2001, from getting the priest to making funeral arrangements we had to do everything ourselves. We were stricken with grief but no relative came to support us. My husband's brother came after two days when all was finished'. For the non-migrant Kashmiri Pandit community, this loss of social relations has had a real impact on human security. As Robinson (2011, p. 11) observes, 'well-being for people is achieved and sustained through relations of activities and relations of care ... (and) where they are disrupted, well-being and security are threatened'.

Threats to Political Security: No Political Choice

Why is it that when a woman joins mainstream politics, she is singled out for abuse all over print and social media, more so than her male counterparts? Why is she subject to violent threats and sexually charged remarks? Why are separatist female politicians not given any recognition or power within the movement but singled out for beatings and humiliation in jails?

Interviewee 18 (aged 34), an activist from Srinagar who was at the centre of a vicious social media campaign in the summer of 2018 for her opinions in support of women in mainstream politics, raises some important questions about political participation and security in the valley.

In Kashmir the entire mainstream political process is considered statist and anti-people. Living in a political conflict exposes Kashmiri women to a lot of security disadvantages. Women who vote are seen as traitors and targeted by militants for violence and their own communities for ridicule. Women politicians are very few, whether in mainstream or separatist politics and nowhere are they given due recognition and decision-making power.

Instead, they are disproportionately targeted to fall in line with the political ideologies of their male relatives and colleagues. Women who participate in elections to *Panchayats* (institutions of village self-governance), the only electoral process that has 50% of seats reserved for women, become the easiest targets for armed violence. The killing of Zoona Begum, a woman *Panch* (elected local representative) from Baramulla by armed gunmen in 2013, is one of many such cases. Women with separatist leanings who take part in street protests are routinely arrested or targeted with armed reprisals by the police.

Thus, political security for women (irrespective of their political affinities) is non-existent in Kashmir. Women like Interviewee 18 have been targeted for their political beliefs and actions by state and non-state actors, and many women like her have been deprived of any real political agency on a meaningful scale.

Environmental Security

Interviewee 19 (aged 32) from Lolab, Kupwara, talks about the destruction of the forests near her village.

Till 1990 the forest guards used to be active and the forests around Khumriyal were dense. Sometimes we would accompany our mothers and aunts and collect mushrooms in the forest. From that time on militants started hiding in the forests. Later the army moved in. They cleared large spaces in the forest to make their barracks. This emboldened local thugs who began illegal logging. With tacit agreement of the armed forces and forest officials these people have reduced the forest to less than half of its size.

As the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development (1992) observes, 'warfare is inherently destructive of development' and 'peace, development and the environment are interdependent and indivisible'. The armed violence in Kashmir is no exception.

According to community activists, 'In the last two decades of Kashmir conflict (sic), security forces have allegedly cleared vast tracts of forest land to target militants taking cover. They also used forests as artillery firing ranges, (or) converted them into military garrisons' (Goswami, 2016). Ecologically fragile areas like mountain meadows and forest ranges have faced large-scale destruction due to the huge pressure of troops in a land scarce state. Some mountain meadows have been used by the armed forces for target practice for heavy artillery.

Interviewee 20 (aged 80) is a victim of this militarisation of mountain meadows. Her husband was a shepherd who died when an unexploded military shell exploded in the bushes where his sheep were grazing. Though she lost her husband 15 years ago, the pain of his death is fresh in her mind. What she feels equally strongly about is the destruction of the beautiful meadow overlooking their village.

My husband and I used to go to the meadow and just walk around while the sheep grazed. It was so peaceful then. The Army completely destroyed the place with their target practice. They didn't even bother to pick up the shells left over from their firing.

Analysis and Discussion

The case studies presented above demonstrate that threats to human security generated by conflict in Kashmir are composite and unrelenting. The data show that the fundamental causes of security threats for the women in Kashmir are a combination of institutional, cultural and structural.

The failure of political institutions in Jammu and Kashmir was exemplified by:

the blatantly rigged state election of 1987 (that) was the immediate provocation for the armed uprising that began in 1990. Since then elections have become a finely honed instrument of the military occupation, a sinister playground for India's deep state. Intelligence agencies have created political parties and decoy politicians, they have constructed and destroyed political careers at will. It is they more than anyone else who decide what the outcome of each election will be. After every election, the Indian establishment declares that India has won a popular mandate from the people of Kashmir. (Jahangir & Shafi, 2013, p. 44)

The massive militarisation that followed was unprecedented in the history of India. In the Kashmir valley, the presence of armed forces has been permanent since the early 1990s, making the military an institution that wields the power vacated by the political institutions and to some extent, the state administration. Structural violence is perpetuated by the armed forces because of the unequal power relationship between the military, the administration and Kashmiri society. The imbalance of power between these institutions has led the armed forces to take control of public and private spaces, people's movement, crowd control and community policing, leading directly to the curtailment of civil rights and killings, injuries, increase in disability, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, mental trauma and environmental damage. Militarisation and the endemic violence it generates has also disrupted the functioning of institutions like the family leading to abandonment and the deplorable condition of widows and half-widows.

In this hyper-militarised society, militarism rooted in hypermasculinity, othering and control is the dominant culture. As Nemeh observes, 'Militarism focuses on instilling and normalising such concepts as sexism, patriotism, nationalism, violence, the excessive use of force and control to maintain its legitimacy' (Reardon, 2010b, p. 319). This leads to a normalisation of violence in public and private spaces. The increase in sexual violence, domestic violence and political violence are all results of militarism and violative of Kashmiri women's basic human rights.

On the other hand, patriarchy is rooted in Kashmiri culture. In the face of an oppositional system of masculine control (that is the armed forces) and the constant threat of sexual violence from it, the feminisation of honour goes into overdrive. The pressure on Kashmiri girls and women to conform to socially determined standards of behaviour becomes even more intense leading to the limiting of livelihood and/or social interaction (in case of widows, half-widows and orphaned girls), an increase in domestic violence and the social ostracisation of rape victims. Socially imposed reduction in agency also threatens access to healthcare in tribal communities like the Gujjars and also political security for

women across Kashmir. The structural interplay between the armed forces and Kashmiri society causes an increase in human security threats for women.

The case study data also show that human security threats affect older and younger women and girls differently in some respects. Young girls can experience a reduction in physical and social mobility as threats of sexual violence or social controls increase. In extreme cases (like that of orphaned girls whose mothers do not have a regular source of income), it can restrict their access to education. For older women, it is loss of husbands, brothers and fathers to killings; enforced disappearance; and widespread arrests that reduces their access to social and economic support and thrusts them into public spaces and roles they are not socially conditioned to inhabit. The case of widows, half-widows and orphaned girls becoming sole breadwinners in their families are examples of this.

Other human security threats such as killings, injuries, disability, obstructed access to healthcare, mental health issues, sexual violence and abandonment affect women from Kashmiri Muslim backgrounds the most, and women from poorer families and remote localities are more prone to these. The loss of male members of the family through killing is most common among Kashmiri Muslim women and to a much lesser extent in Kashmiri Sikh women. In the non-migrant Kashmiri Pandit community, it is not observed in any significant proportion. However, the loss of home and social support networks affects women from the migrant and non-migrant Kashmiri Pandit community disproportionately as compared to Kashmiri Muslim or Kashmiri Sikh women.

Interestingly, the armed conflict and loss of male members of the family have 'led to the opening of new social spaces for ... women in a highly patriarchal society like Kashmir'. Three decades of armed violence have also seen cases of women taking on the roles of protectors of their male relatives publicly, like in the case of women physically trying to stop police or armed forces from arresting male members, women going to police stations and camps to obtain the release of their dear ones and women leading protests against arrests and detentions in their localities. The women of Kashmir are survivors who confront a host of physical, social and economic threats to their security every day and also support their families and communities in confronting the same. Seeing them as victims only seeks to reinforce existing (societal and militaristic) patterns of (patriarchal) domination that seek to limit their agency.

The data collected as part of this study also indicate that militarism employs a self-defeating strategy in the Kashmir valley. Othering, control and violence by armed forces in Kashmir valley is generating alienation against the Indian State among Kashmiris as they lose lives, family, economic support and community networks to it. In other words, the state security approach has resulted in little more than generating enemies for the state over time.

Conclusion

The current security scenario in Jammu and Kashmir shows no significant drop in violence or public alienation. Nearly three decades of state security responses

have focused on just the symptoms of insurgency—armed violence and street protests. There is a total failure to address the causes of widespread alienation among the people of Kashmir from the Indian State that fuels the insurgency. This is why the state security fixation on the part of the Indian government has not yielded significant results towards bringing about peace and security.

A change in security thinking on the part of the Indian government is, thus, the need of the hour. Adopting human security framework in any analysis of security in Kashmir is an essential first step for the Indian government for tackling the causes of insurgency and not just its symptoms. ‘A serious examination of security issues in women’s daily lives in ordinary times and the gender particularities of their experiences in armed conflict is the primary and essential condition for changing security thinking’ (Reardon, 2010a, p. 8, 16; CHS, 2003, p. 4). Understanding the gender particularities of the security issues that Kashmiri women face is then crucial to understanding the Kashmir conflict and, ultimately, resolving it.

Thus, the need of the hour is

Protecting fundamental freedoms—freedoms that are the essence of life—protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations ... using processes that build on people’s strengths and aspirations ... creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.

Any meaningful resolution of the Kashmir conflict must take all these aspects into account as well as the protection of human rights, the promotion of civil liberties and the levelling of the structural power imbalance between the security apparatus and the people. Such a process cannot be begun without the voices of Kashmiri women. Any attempt at resolution without such a composite people-centred approach is doomed to failure.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Sehar Iqbal  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7947-5209>

Notes

1. Jammu and Kashmir has one of the best nutritional indicators in the whole of India according to the National Family Health Survey 4.
2. This thrusts many women into breadwinner roles and into public spaces earlier seen as exclusively male. The loss of brothers and sons to arrests by the police or armed forces

has led Kashmiri women to their local police stations seeking news of their children or on to the streets for protests seeking their return.

3. With a state-wide literacy rate of 67.16% 68.85% against, female literacy here is higher too at 58.95% as opposed to 56.43% state-wide. Pulwama district is the centre of milk production in the valley, and this means high disposable income for families. This coupled with a proliferation of educational institutions (because of its proximity to Srinagar, the summer capital) explains the higher-than-average literacy rates.
4. With Jammu and Kashmir becoming a union territory from the 5 August 2019, the State Women's Commission was dissolved by the central government along with seven other such statutory bodies that dealt with the cases of women, children, the disabled, human rights and public accountability. Its powers and cases have not been passed onto its central counterpart—the National Commission for Women. This has put severe strain on the hundreds of women appellants who, in a majority of cases, cannot pursue their cases without the free legal aid and counselling provided by the Commission.
5. A report by the Jammu and Kashmir Chambers of Commerce and Industry puts the number of job losses in the private sector at 100,000 (one hundred thousand) and total losses to the economy at Rs 1,787,800,000 (Rs 1.78 billion). These are pre- COVID 19 figures.

References

- Alkire, S. (2003). *A conceptual framework for human security* (CRISE Working Paper). Centre for Research on Inequality, Peace and Human Security. Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University.
- Arora, S., & Khan, S. (2017). Knowledge of Gujjar men and women regarding antenatal care in Doda district. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 3(6).
- Bhat, T. M. (2017). Conflict and Women: A Study of Kashmir Valley. *South Asia Journal*.
- Bilal, S. (2015). Women and violence: a study of women's empowerment and its challenges in Jammu and Kashmir. *Research Gate*, 2, 1–9.
- Boyd, R. (2005). Gender and human security issues: Building a programme of action research. *Development in Practice*, 15(1), 115–121.
- Bukhari, F. (2002). Dying day by day. *Himal South Asian*, 15(11), 40–44.
- Butt, I., Batool, E., Rashid, M., Rather, N., & Mushtaq, S. (2016). Do You Remember Kunan Poshpora? Zubaan Books.
- Butalia, U. (2002). (Ed.) *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir*. Kali for Women.
- Census of India (2011). Primary Census Abstracts, Registrar General of India. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- Commission on Human Security (CHS). (2003). *Human security now: Final report*. Commission on Human Security.
- Chenoy, A. M., & Chenoy, K. M. (2010). *Maoist and Other Armed Conflicts*. Penguin.
- Choudhri, Dewan, Manimala & Chhachhi. (1994). *Women's Testimonies from Kashmir: The Green of the Valley is Khaki*. Women's Initiative
- Duschinski, H., & Hoffman, B. (2011). *Everyday violence, institutional denial and struggles for justice in Kashmir*. *Race and Class*, 52(4), 44–70.
- Fowler, P. J., Tompsett, C. J., Braciszewski, J. M., Jacques-Tiura, A. J., & Baltes, B. B. (2009). Community violence: A meta-analysis on the effect of exposure and mental health outcomes of children and adolescents. *Development and Psychopathology*, 21(1), 227–259.
- Goswami, S. (2016, September 12). *Is environment finding a voice in conflict-ridden Kashmir?* Down To Earth.

- Gutierrez, I. A., & Gallegos, J. V. (2016, September 14). *The effect of civil conflict on domestic violence: The case of Peru* (RAND Working Paper Series WR- 1168). SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2851158>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2851158>
- Haq, I. (2017). Conflict and human rights violation: A study of kashmir valley. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 5(3), 117–125.
- Holzner, B., & Truong, T. (1997). Social security versus human security: A gender perspective on problems of transition. In Holzner, B. (Ed.), *Gender and social security in Central–Eastern Europe and the countries of the Former Soviet Union: A resource guide*. Institute of Social Studies and Netherlands Development Assistance.
- Housen, T., Lenglet, A., Ariti, C., Shah, S., Shah, H., Ara, S., Viney, K., Janes, K., Pintaldi, G. (2017). Prevalence of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder in the Kashmir Valley. *BMJ Global Health*, 2(19), 1–13.
- Hudson, H. (2005, June). ‘Doing’ security as though humans matter: A feminist perspective on gender and the politics of human security. *Security Dialogue*, 36(2), 155–174.
- Human Rights. (1993). ‘Rape in Kashmir: A crime of war’ (Vol. 5, Issue 9). Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/INDIA935.PDF>
- Iqbal, S., & Magill, S. (2021). Women, dissent, and Kashmir: A case study of female protest. In N. Dhar, & P. R. Ahmad (Eds.), *Contemporary gender movements in India: Space, conformity, dissent and new temporalities*. Bloomsbury Academic India.
- Jahangir, M. S., & Shafi, A. (2013, April). Status of human rights in democratic setup: Experiences from Kashmir. *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution*, 4(3), 41–47.
- Joseph, T. (2000). Kashmir, human rights and the Indian press. *Contemporary South Asia*, 9(1), 41–55.
- Kazi, S. (2009). Shopian: War, gender and democracy in Kashmir. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(49), 13–15.
- Leaning, J., & Arie, S. (2001). *Human security: A framework for assessment in conflict and transition* (HCPDS Working Paper Series). 11(8):1–73.
- Lone, I. (2010). *Impact of Conflict on Women in Kashmir*. Research Gate.
- Mahase, E. (2019). Kashmir Communications Blackout is putting patients at risk, doctors warn. *The British Medical Journal*, 366.
- Manchanda, R. (Ed.). (1999a). *Women, war and peace in South Asia: Beyond victimhood to agency*. SAGE Publications.
- Manchanda, R. (1999b, May 1). *Kashmir’s worse-off half*. Himal South Asian.
- Maneckshaw, F. (2017). *Behold, I shine: Narratives of Kashmir’s Women and Children*. Rupa Publications.
- Manjoo, R. (2014, April 1). *Report of the special rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Addendum: Mission to India* (A/HRC/26/38/Add.1, para 23). UN Human Rights Council. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53982c3e4.html>
- Mushtaq, S., & Bukhari, S. R. (2018). Critique of statist narrative of women empowerment in Kashmir. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53(2), 1–10.
- Parmar, P. K., Agrawal, P., Goyal, R., Scott, J., & Greenough P. G. (2014). Need for a gender-sensitive human security framework: Results of a quantitative study of human security and sexual violence in Djohong district, Cameroon. *Conflict and Health*, 8(6), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1752-1505-8-6>
- Qayoom, F. (2014). Women and armed conflict: Widows in Kashmir. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 6(5), 161–165.
- Qutab, S. (2012). Women victims of armed conflict: Half-widows in Jammu and Kashmir. *Sociological Bulletin*, 61(2), 255–278.
- Reardon, B. A. (1985). *Sexism and the War System*. Teachers College Press.

- Reardon, B. A. (2010a) Women and human security. In B. A. Reardon & A. Hans (Eds.), *The gender imperative: Human security vs state security*. Routledge.
- Reardon, B. A. (2010b). Jordanian women define security: A feminist approach to an age old problem. In B. A. Reardon, & A. Hans (Eds.), *The gender imperative: Human security vs state security*. Routledge.
- Rehbar, Q., & Zahra, M. (2019). *How women are suffering under India's Kashmir crackdown*, TRT World. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/this-is-how-women-are-suffering-under-india-s-kashmir-crackdown-31692>
- Robinson, F. (2011). *The Ethics of Care: A feminist Approach to Human Security*. Temple University Press.
- Thapar, K. (2019, September 15). *We cannot be selective about the past in Jammu and Kashmir*. Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/we-cannot-be-selective-about-the-past-in-j-k/story-ELfaDpC6UoAfMbBNQTgIsO.html>
- United Nations Human Security Unit Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2009). *Human security in theory and practice* (p. 7). United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security.
- Van Der Mollen & Ball. E. (2011). Staging “small, small incidents”: Dissent, gender, and militarization among young people in Kashmir. *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 60, 93–10.
- Walikhanna, C. (2004). *Women, Silent Victims in Armed Conflict: An Area Study of Jammu & Kashmir, India*. Serials Publications.